

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

**THE COMMANDER AND THE MEDIA:  
A LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE**

by

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### **Abstract**

Within a democracy, public opinion is often the strategic center of gravity during military operations. Our enemy knows this and fully exploits the information environment against us. In order to be effective, commanders require the necessary skill sets and resources to execute an effective strategic communication strategy to counter this effort. Information operations and public affairs capabilities provide commanders the ability to shape the information environment and public opinion. However, commanders are not educated, trained or resourced to leverage this capability.

The research method used for this paper was problem/solution and qualitative in nature. The purpose of this research was to explore solutions to mitigate risks for commanders when engaging the media and shaping public opinion through the information instrument of power. This research effort found technology and policy have impacted the military-media relationship and commanders must recognize how to successfully use technology and governmental policy in dominating the information domain. In addition, commanders receive limited education, training, and resources on how to engage the media. A focused effort is needed to educate, train, and resource commanders for influence operations. Finally, insufficient strategic guidance, doctrine, and planning within the joint and Air Force communities cause undue risk for commanders preparing operations in the information domain. Air Force public affairs doctrine requires a detailed review to improve planning guidance for commanders.

*“Public opinion is everything. With it, nothing can fail. Without it, nothing can succeed.”<sup>1</sup>*

*Abraham Lincoln*

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Research Question and Thesis**

How should the DOD manage risk with respect to the Global Information Environment (GIE) and media engagement? What skill sets and resources are required of military operational commanders when engaging the media? The DOD must better define and manage risk associated with shaping public opinion at home and abroad to better influence the GIE and provide a synchronized message across all levels of government including the military instrument of power. Military commanders have a vital role in shaping public opinion and require the necessary skill sets and resources to achieve success and mitigate risk when engaging the media.

### **Problem Background and Significance**

Strategic communications (SC) has become the buzz word these days brought about through an ineffective military media campaign in the midst of an unpopular war. This has become a lesson the military, in particular commanders, must take to heart. An unwanted lesson...albeit, a lesson worth learning. According to Josten: “There is little cooperation, coordination, or even appreciation of the impact of strategic communication.”<sup>2</sup> So what is Strategic Communication? According to the National Security Council, Strategic Communication is defined as “The coordination of Statecraft, Public Affairs, Public Diplomacy, Military Information Operations and other activities, reinforced by political, economic and military actions, in a synchronized manner.”<sup>3</sup> Notice that public affairs and information operations are key enablers “to be synchronized.”



Information operations (IO) and public affairs (PA) have different and distinct missions. IO includes the following disciplines: psychological operations (PSYOP), deception, operations security (OPSEC), electronic warfare (EW), and computer network operations (CNO).<sup>4</sup> PA's mission is to communicate truthful and factual information, advise the commander on media operations, help with message development, etc.<sup>5</sup> Synchronizing these efforts will continue to be a challenge for commanders at all levels.

How can a commander use IO and PA to achieve unity of effort and ultimately the desired objectives? Information operations, including PA, can aid the commanders in shaping the information environment aimed at the desired audience. Massing effects can influence the audience resulting in a public opinion dominated by the message. Public opinion has been and continues to be the strategic center of gravity within a democracy. Our enemy knows this better than we do and fully exploits this environment against us. Commander's efforts must continue in the IO and PA domain to shape public opinion. The military-media relationship is a critical piece of that puzzle.

Historically, the military-media relationship has been a struggle for accommodation by the military and access for the media. It truly is a partnership where both sides must recognize realities and context of the situation. Technology advancements thrust the media onto the battlefield with unprecedented ease. The military's quest to improve the relationship led to an overwhelming number of journalists covering Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. During both campaigns, roughly 770 journalists were "embedded with coalition forces and 550 with ground units generating over 6,000 stories per week."<sup>6</sup>

However, in their zeal to accommodate the media during the war, it seems military leaders have failed to ensure commanders are equipped with the necessary education, training,

decision-making skills, and resources to meet future expectations. Not only are these requirements necessary in war, but in peacetime as well. Commanders must be adequately equipped to determine the accepted risk level when deciding when, where and how to engage the media.

The unyielding truth is that the 24/7 news cycle has dictated the information-age battlefield. Commanders must realize the threat and engage in mass to achieve desired results and objectives when dealing with the media. Only a properly equipped commander will succeed in shaping the global information environment to benefit their situation and mitigate the risk when engaging, or not engaging, the media.

### **Research Methodology and Argument**

The research method used for this paper is problem/solution. The problem examined is the lack of clear guidance, training and resources provided to commanders at the tactical level in terms of media engagement and the information instrument of power. Research includes education and training of Army and Air Force officers, public affairs manning within the USAF, strategic and national guidance, and doctrinal impacts on commander's ability to execute an effective SC, PA and IO campaign. Conclusions and recommendations are provided that may be useful to PA leadership and commanders at the tactical level to better influence the GIE and successfully engage the media.

There has typically been little to no emphasis placed on the tactical commander's role in how to shape public opinion in peacetime and wartime. Commanders require the necessary skill sets and resources to execute an effective strategic communication strategy and help restore US credibility and trustworthiness throughout the world. This paper explores solutions to mitigate risks for commanders when engaging the media and shaping public opinion through the

information instrument of power. How can the commander successfully leverage the military-media relationship to influence the GIE and reduce risk associated with the information domain?

Historically, technology and government policy have impacted the military-media relationship throughout the years. Recognizing the demand and zeal in a 24/7 news environment is crucial to how commanders integrate PA and IO to achieve desired effects. Policy and strategic guidance provides the basis for how commanders shape the information environment. Strategic communications at the national level has been hard pressed to gain momentum. Separate initiatives failed in the Clinton and Bush administrations. There clearly needs to be a strategic communication office at the national level to help shape public opinion and support commander's efforts at the tactical level. In addition, education, training, and resources are critical to commanders when engaging the media and implementing IO and PA efforts. The Air Force in particular has reduced PA manning over the last several years producing negative impacts. Unless education and training opportunities increase, commanders will continue to face challenges trying to influence the GIE. Low PA manning levels have a direct and lasting effect for commanders when tasked to influence operations and engage the media. Lastly, Army doctrine provides a public affairs tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) publication defining PA roles in the Joint Operational Planning Process (JOPP). TTPs provide commanders proven methods to achieve desired effects. Currently, USAF does not provide a PA TTP to commanders. Air Force PA doctrine must incorporate all phases of the joint operational planning process (JOPP) and provide a TTP similar to Army doctrine. In addition, joint doctrine needs to incorporate TTPs to ensure unity of effort at the joint level. Lack of education, training, manpower, national political guidance, and tactical planning doctrine increase the risk for commanders when tasked to influence the GIE through media engagement.

## **RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS**

### **Game Changers: Technology and Policy**

Many dynamic changes in the military-media relationship have occurred over time including technological breakthroughs, access to military operations, and governmental policy. This relationship can be traced back to the civil war when the telegraph introduced a new medium for media to exploit and use to their full potential. Reporters were frequently accused by both sides as spies and Ulysses Grant disdain for reporters is common knowledge. However, President Lincoln frequently relied on reporters for updated information. World War I saw the first “embedded” correspondent system where reporters traveled with the units and even wore uniforms and rank. However, this did not come without price – censorship was the central theme in this era. Government policy stretched the limits of free speech. An accreditation process was implemented by the War Department, “the Sedition Act of 1918 made it illegal to criticize the government,”<sup>7</sup> and the Committee on Public Information led the censorship and propaganda efforts.

Technology and policy continued to evolve during World War II. Wire and wireless means of transmitting data across the oceans made it easier for correspondents to report events from the front. Even though an Office of Censorship was established in WWII, voluntary censorship was asked of media outlets. Over 2,600 journalists covered WWII and the relationship during WWII was extremely positive. The Korean conflict saw the beginnings of a tumultuous military-media relationship with McArthur censoring the press when China entered the war. The relationship did not improve in the interwar years of Korea and Vietnam. An unpopular Vietnam War tested the military’s ability to influence the media and public opinion. Vietnam was the first televised war, another technology breakthrough, adding to the challenge.

Credibility and objectivity became an issue. When military and governmental reports contradicted with correspondent on-scene reports public opinion fell dramatically.<sup>8</sup> The Lessons of Vietnam in terms of access, truth reporting, and overall relationships are vital to ensuring successful military operations and public support. Grenada and Panama operations created an even deeper discontent on both sides. However, the censorship in the Grenada campaign was contested by media sources and the Sidle Panel was established to investigate. A key outcome was the recommendation to involve public affairs in operational planning. We'll discuss this in more detail later.

It wasn't until Operation Desert Storm that the relationship began to improve. Satellite communications changed the way the media covered war. On scene live reports brought real time images and reporting into the living rooms of America on a 24-hour basis. However, the military still controlled most of the message dissemination through constant military briefings. Few of the 1,600 reporters covering the war were embedded with military units. Even though technology and policy changed the landscape of war correspondence, it was not enough to satisfy the media in their watchdog role for America. Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) faced similar restraints and criticism from the media. The nature of this conflict, with covert operations taking center stage, was the main reason for the limited access granted to journalists.

However, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) turned the tide for the military-media relationship and policy shifted to more access to tactical units. Embedded reporters reached an overwhelming number with 770 journalists embedded with coalition forces and 550 with ground units.<sup>9</sup> Some reports indicated more than 3,000 journalists were in the region covering the war.<sup>10</sup> However, after the fall Baghdad there were less than forty reporters embedded with military units. The military-media relationship successes of Operation Desert Storm were not shared in

OIF.<sup>11</sup> The big picture was often not communicated, a DOD policy issue that the media associated with limited transparency resulting in criticism of the Bush administration. So there seems to be some major lessons not yet learned by the military when it comes to the media relationship. The information instrument of power must be addressed and structured to support the overall political objectives and national end state. Planning at the strategic, operational, and tactical level must address access for journalists, during peacetime and contingencies or crisis, in addition to how the military will accommodate reporters. Even though the information domain has been labeled a national instrument of power, government and the military have not yet taken steps to effectively leverage its power.

### **The Information Instrument of Power**

#### ***Information – The Forgotten Power***

Information, in multiple domains, can be a strategic center of gravity influenced by tactical operations. The information instrument of power is perhaps the least understood, yet the most important in today's technically advanced world. Information is power and power wields coercive strength. Those who control and dominate the information battlespace will shape and influence the global information environment. According to Army Field Manual 3-13, Information Operations, the Information Environment is defined as "the aggregate of individuals, organizations or systems that collect, process, or disseminate information; also included is the information itself."<sup>12</sup> The impact commanders have at the strategic, operational and tactical level to influence the information environment cannot be overstated.

The military, and specifically commanders at the tactical level, must realize shaping public opinion involves recognition of the battlespace and include planning and execution efforts to control, or at least influence, the GIE domain. If commanders do not plan for IO and PA

operations up front, the GIE may be dominated by the enemy or civilian media. Dr. Lawrence Yates of the US Army Command and Staff College said “like it or not, the news media have more impact than most other agencies on how an operation is perceived by the outside world.”<sup>13</sup> If not addressed effectively, the impact will be loss of initiative and a national and military end state more difficult to achieve.<sup>14</sup> There is an inherent link between the strategic message and operations at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of war. The strategic message guides the operational and tactical message. How to achieve “unity of message” begins with recognizing IO and PA as strategic enablers.

### ***Information as a Strategic Enabler***

National strategic guidance and joint doctrine provide guidance and direction for IO and strategic communications (SC), to include PA, in strategic operations. The 2004 National Military Strategy (NMS) briefly touches on strategic communications and information sharing to ensure “unity of themes and messages” through public diplomacy and public affairs operations. The NMS further tasks combatant commanders at the strategic level with executing a strategic communications plan.<sup>15</sup> Joint Publication 3-61, Public Affairs, states “in order to provide timely, accurate information to our audiences, PA must be thoroughly incorporated in every phase of military operations.”<sup>16</sup> From deterrence to the end state, PA plays a critical role in shaping public opinion. Public perception management historically has taken various avenues over the years. At the national level, harnessing perception management has been difficult.

Joint Publication 3-13, Joint Doctrine for Information Operations, states “DOD contributes to Public Diplomacy (PD), which includes those overt international information activities of the USG designed to promote US foreign policy objectives...” Furthermore, JP 3-13 says “when approved, PSYOP assets may be employed in support of Direct Support of Public

Diplomacy (DPSD) as part of security cooperation initiatives or in support of US embassy PD programs.”<sup>17</sup> Perception management programs at the national strategic level have consistently involved IO capabilities to influence the international community’s perception of the US. Two programs worth considering were implemented under two separate administrations and were criticized for using IO capabilities to communicate US goals and policies more effectively and positively influence international perception.

***Perception Management – The Real Purpose of SC***

In 1999, President Clinton implemented the office of International Public Information (IPI) – a combination of public diplomacy, public affairs, and international military information – after negative domestic and international press over the lack of US leadership in the Haiti and Rwanda crises. The US was reeling from a botched Somalia intervention effort and the Clinton administration was not prepared to quickly intervene in another hot zone around the globe. By using information management, an element of soft power, Clinton attempted to synchronize messages on US policy to avoid an international crisis or contingency. A policy shadowed in public diplomacy. The IPI effort was short lived however due to IPI’s connection with the intelligence community, specifically military IO, and a perception by the media that transparency was being sacrificed to push a tainted party line.<sup>18</sup> The IPI office was deactivated and efforts ceased in 2001 with the new administration.

Even before September 11, 2001, President Bush had his own ideas about how best to manage international perception. The Rendon Group was contracted to implement a perception management campaign. The Office of Global Communications was set up at the State Department (DOS) to better explain US policies abroad. Within the Department of Defense (DOD) another office was set up – the Office of Strategic Influence and later Office of Strategic



Communications (OSC). Both efforts were less than successful. The turf battles about where and who should control the strategic communications program affected the administration's strategic communication efforts. However, the Rendon Group and others, were able to influence decision-making at the national leadership level emphasizing the importance of strategic communications in terms of organizational construct and time sensitive message development. They stressed SC must gain the initiative to shape the GIE and rapidly respond to inaccurate reports. But this was not enough. Fighting an uphill battle with two ongoing wars, public opinion, in the US and internationally, did not improve. Both of these efforts, IPI and OSC, even though short lived, prove a desire to control and influence public opinion at the strategic level through the information domain. Their downfall was the transparent use of IO capabilities such as PSYOP, deception, and others. PA operations were synchronized with IO and public diplomacy and found common ground to ensure PA remained true – credible and truthful information, even though the media did not agree. Recently, the US Air Force recognized the importance of information management in shaping public perception by reorganizing SC with PA functions.

Major General Darren McDew, former Director of Public Affairs, Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, announced combining public affairs and strategic communications functions into one office. General McDew said “now we have an organization going forward that has a full spectrum communication capability.”<sup>19</sup> The new organization structure will have full spectrum capability in terms of message development and dissemination at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Combining PA's day to day operations with the long term vision of strategic communications will synchronize efforts and more effectively shape the information domain and public perception about the US Air Force and its contributions to the security of the

US.<sup>20</sup> By combining PA with SC, the USAF has produced the framework for tactical operations to support long term objectives through effective message development. Commanders at the tactical level are now charged with leading an information campaign in their own backyards – whether that is at a deployed location or at home station. According to Brigadier General Mari Eder, US Army Deputy Chief of Public Affairs, “strategic communication is not public affairs, but what it brings to public affairs is the strategic tie, focus, and structure.”<sup>21</sup> Efforts such as combining SC with PA at the service strategic level are a step in the right direction. However, the top-down approach needs to reach the tactical level. Education, training, and resources at the tactical level must be given priority to influence the information battlespace.

## **Shaping the Global Information Environment**

### ***Education and Training***

Being able to shape and frame the global information information environment, or battlespace, begins with education and training of both military and media personnel. Retired Army Major General Patrick Brady, former Chief of Army Public Affairs, said “Clausewitz may not have listed information as a principle of war, but today it is, whether we like it or not. There is not enough training on public information in the military educational system. We are working on this issue.”<sup>22</sup> That was 20 years ago. So what has changed? According to JP 3-61, Public Affairs, the “Defense Information School, located at Fort George G. Meade, Maryland, is the DOD-directed school that conducts career-long training and development of PA and visual information (VI) professionals.” Officers, enlisted and civilian PA professionals are trained at the Defense Information School. Other USG employees are admitted on a limited basis.<sup>23</sup>

To better shape the information battlespace the Army realized more education and training was needed for the tactical soldier. They incorporated limited lessons in their

commissioned officer and non-commissioned officer professional military education (PME) courses. Officers in career field courses and at each level of PME receive at least two hours of training “to participate in a media interview.”<sup>24</sup> Army FM 3-61.1, Public Affairs Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures, provides critical information in regards to how best to execute PA operations. The detailed manual provides PA personnel an operational planning approach and defines how best to achieve desired goals and effects. However, the manual has not been revised in over 8 years bringing into question the importance of the material.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, the USAF briefly covers SC, IO and PA within PME curriculum. Air Command and Staff College, an intermediate professional developmental school for commissioned officers, recently included an elective in the curriculum to focus on the military-media relationship, strategic communications, public affairs and information operations. However, the course is limited as an elective only. Strategic Communications, PA and IO are discussed throughout the year in various joint planning courses and applied airpower studies. The USAF Public Affairs Center of Excellence (PACE) provides SC and PA education and training to senior leaders. According to the course elective’s syllabus, “PACE incorporates SC, specifically PA capabilities, into educational plans to aid senior leader development to complete joint strategic communication, specifically PA tasks by joint force commanders at multiple levels of commands, such as strategic national and strategic theater, consistent with CJCSM 3500.04D, Universal Joint Task List.”<sup>26</sup> Even though the USAF meets joint force strategic guidance, the tactical level commander does not benefit from SC or PA education and training except in limited circumstances. Commanders rely on their PA officer (PAO) to train and educate military personnel at the tactical level when engaging the media. Often this training is immediate and

limited due to resource constraints. Commanders must have the resources and manning necessary to carry out the SC and PA missions.

Joint Publication (JP) 3-61, Public Affairs, includes military exercises to train military personnel in PA operations and media engagement. JP 3-61 states “all PA personnel and appropriate members should be trained in basic operational skills and in the tasks involved with joint PA activities” and further states “PA is a mission of the commander...and exercising should include the entire staff.” This implies exercises should be specific to PA and designed to train PA personnel and the commander’s staff. Furthermore, JP 3-61 infers only strategic level commanders, PA and command staff should be trained in PA operations leaving out commanders at the tactical level. Case in point, during the course of action (COA) wargaming phase of the OIF joint operational planning process (JOPP), public information and public diplomacy were not addressed or exercised. Real world events during OIF such as fratricide and collateral damage were not part of the planning process and commanders were ill prepared to handle the media.<sup>27</sup> If planned and wargamed effectively, these situations would be expected and courses of action developed to limit the exposure risk through aggressive media engagement.

Education and training at all levels requires commitment and investment from all services to leverage SC and PA capabilities. If PA events are properly exercised and commanders trained at all levels of command, media requests and positive or negative events will be expected and planned for accordingly during the JOPP. Commanders at the tactical level require the knowledge, education, and skill set to effectively engage the media and help shape the GIE in their area of operations (AO). Career PA cadre personnel at the Defense Information School and service specific PA professionals play a major role in extending the knowledge base to commanders.

### *The Public Affairs Officer*

The Public Affairs Officer (PAO) advises the commander and is the primary link between the commander and the media. They interact directly with media and units at all levels to gain the proper perspective and relay that perspective, or message, to the media. The PAO is responsible to accommodate the media when applicable and advise the commander on methods to influence the GIE and gain public support for operations or counter enemy propaganda. These responsibilities are inherent across the services and in the joint environment.<sup>28</sup>

Even though the PAO provides a critical function engaging the media for the commander, USAF manning levels in the PA profession have decreased in the past several years. PAO manning was reduced by 48 percent in the USAF over the last three years. In 2005, there were 470 PAOs in the USAF and only 246 remained as of November 2008. Many PAO slots are being filled by officers from other career fields or civilians. Major General McDew, former Director USAF Public Affairs, indicated in an interview with the Air Force Times that PAO accessions could increase over time in the USAF.<sup>29</sup> US Central Command (CENTCOM) felt the impact of staff reductions first hand in the midst of overwhelming OEF and OIF media requests. By 2004, CENTCOM's joint PA staff dropped from 70 to 10 personnel. The small staff was unable to keep pace with the information demand generated by the international community. CENTCOM ultimately increased their PA staff in addition to implementing innovative techniques to rapidly respond to negative reports and blogosphere comments to counter enemy propaganda and influence the GIE at home and abroad.<sup>30</sup> It is difficult to gauge if the lack of PA personnel damaged CENTCOM's credibility with the media. However, if CENTCOM was unable to respond to media requests the US military's effort to influence the GIE was not effective and the information void filled by other sources, possibly inaccurate sources. The

bottom line and lesson learned is that to effectively communicate and influence public perception at home and abroad PA shops must be properly resourced.

***Themes, Messages and Action***

Although manpower sourcing is extremely vital in influencing public perception and providing a critical capability to the commander, just as important is message development reinforced through principles of truth and credibility. Principles guiding PA operations ensure truthful, timely, accurate, and available information as long as operations security allows it. The message, from a PA standpoint, must be developed from the core elements of credibility and truth to impart confidence in national and international audiences and counter enemy propaganda. Themes and messages must be synchronized with IO, “but PA is not an IO discipline,” it is strictly a related activity.<sup>31</sup> As seen above in the public perception campaigns of the Clinton and Bush administrations, these lines can become blurred in the media’s eyes resulting in criticism for mixing the IO and PA disciplines. The perception in the media becomes government deceit and less than truthful information leading to media distrust of the military.

To counter negative perceptions and enhance the trust factor, an effective SC and PA campaign must be built around a message supported by action to reinforce and influence public opinion. Joint Publication 3-13 states “while intents differ, PA and IO ultimately support the dissemination of information, themes, and messages adapted to their audiences.” In 2006, Mr. John Rendon, CEO and President of the Rendon Group said “the US military operation for Tsunami relief is the only strategic victory in the GWOT in four years.”<sup>32</sup> During relief operations, strategic communications, reinforced with action and message, enabled an extremely positive international reaction to US support. A whole of government effort, the Tsunami relief

actions executed by DOD, DOS, IGOs and NGOs, provided images and messages that were generated by the media across the world. Strategic communications planned and executed during the crisis influenced the GIE and should be considered a valuable lesson for future SC operations.

### **Influence Operations and PA Planning**

Decision superiority over the enemy is a critical function of the joint force. The 2004 National Military Strategy stated in order to achieve decision superiority “information operations, both offensive and defensive, are key to ensuring US freedom of action across the battlespace.”<sup>33</sup> Dominating the information domain and influencing the GIE center of gravity provides a distinct advantage over the adversary. Proactively engaging the GIE, using IO capabilities and related capabilities, such as PA, yields freedom of action when used effectively.

#### ***Center of Gravity – The Global Information Environment***

The enemy understands the inherent weakness of an open democratic society when engaged in a long drawn out war: public opinion. Public opinion, either in the international community, in the Area of Responsibility (AOR), or in the US, is a center of gravity for US and coalition forces. The enemy uses the GIE to attack public opinion in order to achieve their objectives. The USG and military must understand this and counter these attacks in mass – SC and PA can play a major role supporting this effort if integrated into a holistic information operation.<sup>34</sup> Two case studies in Iraq provide the nucleus for an argument to improve integration of PA into the IO plan to mass effects in the information battlespace.

Operation Vigilant Resolve, a response to murdered Blackwater contractors, failed because IO was not fully integrated into the battle plan. Overwhelming combat power could not overcome media reports of collateral damage and lack of support from the Iraqi Interim

Government. The enemy gained the initiative in the GIE through local media outlets forcing a negative public opinion about the operation. Due to lack of support, the Marines were marginally effective.<sup>35</sup> If IO had been immersed into the overall battle plan, support from key leaders in the community would have emerged. In addition, if PA efforts were integrated from the beginning friendly forces would have gained the initiative and shaped the GIE to their favor.

In the second case study Operation Al-Fajr proved much more successful. Learning from Operation Vigilant Resolve, planners prepared to influence the GIE and the international community during the planning phases. Planners developed an “IO threshold” to allow commanders to “visualize” a point when enemy IO would undermine Coalition force operations. The enemy uses IO to spread propaganda through the media creating a perception of “indiscriminate, disproportionate, and violations of the rules of war.”<sup>36</sup> Realizing negative media coverage could impact the operations, commanders planned for all kinetic operations to be executed “under” the IO threshold. However, commanders also realized the decisive operation to win the battle would cross the threshold and they needed to plan for the information effects when this happened. Commanders decided to mass effects in the IO domain, through IO and PA operations. Massing effects raised the threshold giving commanders more leeway in how to conduct kinetic operations. Flooding the information domain with IO and PA capabilities allowed more options to commanders once fighting began and ensured a strong base of support from key community leaders and media.<sup>37</sup> The center of gravity in both operations proved to be public opinion. The decisive factor was integrating IO and PA into the planning effort and influencing the GIE in supporting the operation.

The main concern with integrating PA and IO in the operational planning process stems from purpose. IO capabilities must not infiltrate PA capabilities thus discrediting PA operations.



This can be very difficult to achieve. The tendency to exclude PA from planning is common due to the transparency responsibilities inherent in PA efforts. For example, an after action report for Operation Just Cause stated:

During Operation Just Cause, PA planning and integration were inadequate. Commanders at all levels failed to involve public affairs officers in planning from fear of OPSEC leaks. The results were insufficient PA guidance provided to soldiers, family members and commanders; sometimes miscommunication to and confusion within Army family elements; and misuse of PA assets. A matter of urgent concern was the failure to plan for and use Reserve Component PA assets to relieve the pressure on an already small active PA force so that it could better handle both internal and external communication.<sup>38</sup>

In order to effectively influence the GIE and public opinion, PA must be synchronized and integrated into the IO plan. However, the lessons learned in 1990 have not resonated within the joint planning communities. How best to integrate these efforts is still the question today.

Creative integration, such as use of images and complete storylines quickly available to the media through common medium, is one method to synchronize efforts and gain the initiative. Getting the truth out first before the enemy attempts to dominate the GIE is critical to successful operations. During operations, commanders must plan for combat camera and photographic support and ensure a well designed process to disseminate images up the chain to PA elements for distribution. This allows commanders to gain the initiative for IO. Truth and credibility are inherent in PA operations and media understand this and report accordingly. This method of integration was used successfully in 2006 when the US Embassy in Baghdad was attacked by rocket fire. Massing information in the form of images and storylines were immediately vetted through the chain of command then attached to a common medium accessible to media. Images from UAVs caught the enemy firing rockets at the embassy. These images coupled with a lightly damaged structure led to themes of incompetence by enemy forces.<sup>39</sup> By getting the information out first, the media changed reporting themes from the coalition's inability to protect

the embassy to a more positive story for the coalition of enemy incompetence to hit the desired target.

The capabilities IO and PA bring to the fight must be fully understood. Commanders for Operation Al-Fajr and the Baghdad embassy attack fully understood IO and PA capabilities and the inherent differences. Operation Vigilant Resolve provided a valuable lesson if IO and PA are not integrated into the operational planning phase. Learning from past mistakes is critical to implementing PA and IO capabilities. These capabilities must be incorporated into the planning process from the beginning in order to achieve the desired effect.

### ***The Planning Process***

A review of joint, Air Force and Army IO and PA doctrine revealed dissimilar depth of information in relation to planning activities and processes. As discussed above, public opinion, either at home or abroad, can be a critical center of gravity. Our enemies understand this and flood the GIE with propaganda and disinformation in an attempt to attack this center of gravity. Because public opinion can be a center of gravity it is important for commanders and their PA staff to engage in operational planning to mitigate risk of events reported in the GIE. Planning is the first step to impacting the military-media relationship and understanding the risk levels.

### ***IO Planning Doctrine***

Joint Publication 3-13, Information Operations, Chapter IV, provides unique IO considerations in each step of the JOPP. The JOPP includes seven steps: 1) initiation, 2) mission analysis, 3) course of action (COA) development, 4) COA analysis and wargaming, 5) COA comparison, 6) COA selection, and 7) plan or order development. Beginning with step one, Initiation, through the final step, Plan or Order Development, JP 3-13 provides a clear understanding of how the IO Cell fits into the joint planning process and what actions are

required in each step of the JOPP. In addition, IO capabilities such as Electronic Warfare and Psychological Operations have their own doctrine further detailing how these capabilities are integrated into the joint planning process. However, IO related capabilities, such as PA, do not have a subset doctrine to IO and therefore have not developed doctrine in concert with the JOPP.

A review of Army FM 3-13, Information Operations: Doctrine, Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTP), provides detailed planning instruction throughout the JOPP process. The Military Decision Making Process (MDMP) is another term the Army uses to depict the JOPP, a proven analytical process. FM 3-13 follows this process through the JOPP to develop IO plans integrated into the operational plan. From plan initiation through plan development, FM 3-13 specifies actions required in each step of the JOPP.

Very different from JP 3-13 and FM 3-13, Air Force Doctrine Document 2-5, Information Operations, does not address what actions are required in each step of joint planning but rather focuses on an effects-based approach (EBO) at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. For example, at the tactical level AFDD 2-5 states: “The emphasis on effects is as crucial for successful IO as for any other air and space power function.”<sup>40</sup> Further discussions on the relationship between strategic guidance and the desired effect attempt to explain the IO effects-based approach. AFDD 2-5 also states “a target is a specific area, object, audience, function, or facility subject to military action on which we want to create an effect.”<sup>41</sup> The targeting process links the effects with the objective and ensures the effect supports the military and political end state. This framework explains IO and actions in Air Force terminology but does not necessarily provide a logical planning framework to plan and integrate IO capabilities into the planning process.

***Public Affairs Doctrine***

Joint Publication 3-61, Public Affairs, Chapter III provides a list of planning considerations, to include the importance of PA operations in every operational phase. An emphasis is also placed on exercises as a training ground for PA personnel and the commander's staff. However, there is no mention of how commanders at the tactical level are to be integrated into the training plan. Risk level increases by neglecting to provide a doctrinal training baseline for tactical commanders. Areas such as Public Affairs Guidance, Operational Plans, Media Operations, Combat Camera, and other as depicted in Figure 1 are briefly covered.

<b>Public Affairs Planning Considerations</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercises</li> <li>• Media Access</li> <li>• Combat Camera</li> <li>• Joint Information Bureaus</li> <li>• Embedding</li> <li>• Media Pools</li> <li>• Technology Support to PA</li> <li>• Command/Internal Information</li> <li>• Armed Forces Radio and Television Service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internet Based Products/Releases</li> <li>• Security</li> <li>• Host Nation</li> <li>• Allies/Coalition Partners</li> <li>• Country Team</li> <li>• IGOs/NGOs</li> <li>• Interagency Coordination</li> <li>• Dissemination of Interagency Guidance</li> <li>• Analysis and Feedback</li> <li>• Counter Adversary Propaganda</li> </ul>

Figure 1. Public Affairs Planning Considerations<sup>42</sup>

Figure 2 is a simplified organizational chart from JP 3-61 listing Plans as a responsibility of the Joint Force Public Affairs Officer.<sup>43</sup> However, there is no joint guidance in JP 3-61 on PA functions and actions within the various steps of the JOPP. The JOPP is not covered and JP 3-61 does not provide the PA force with an effective tool to plan for effect and gain the initiative over the enemy to influence the GIE. Other than explaining what PA's role is and the various areas to consider, planning as understood in the joint process is not covered.

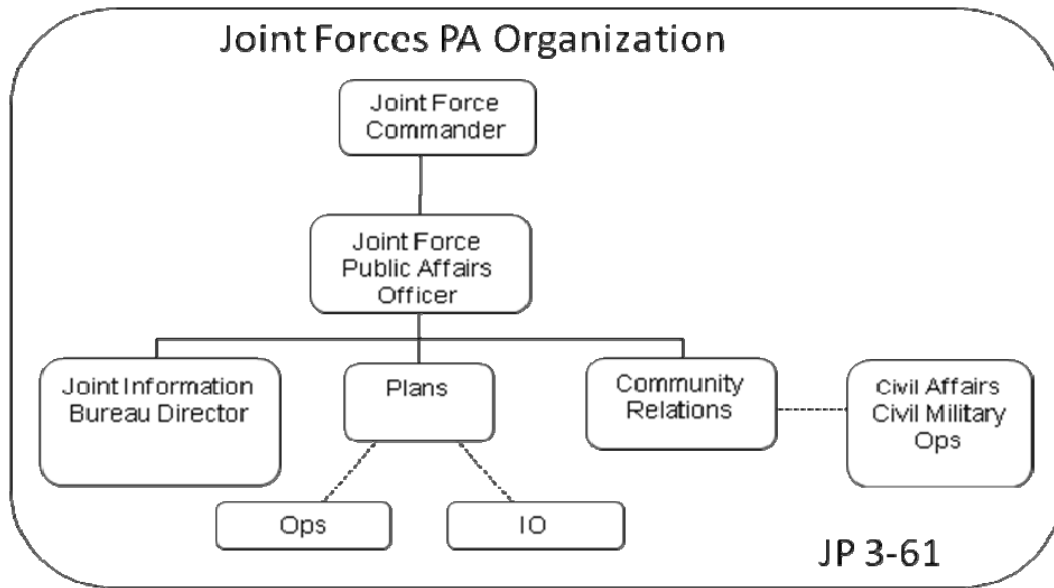


Figure 2. Joint Forces PA Organization.<sup>44</sup>

Similar to JP 3-61, Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2-5.3, Public Affairs Operations, does not provide PA personnel with actions required of PA during the JOPP. AFDD 2-5.3, states “the strategic effect PA operations can achieve highlights the importance in ensuring PA personnel are involved at the earliest planning stages as well as during the execution and assessment of operations.”<sup>45</sup> Even though PA should be involved at the earliest stages of planning, there is no Air Force doctrine or tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) to guide PA actions through joint planning. Major General Darren McDew, the Air Force’s former top PA professional, was quoted as saying “it takes a little more work to plan ahead, anticipate a problem and make it go away...”<sup>46</sup> His comments were aimed at the inherent nature of the PAO’s role in being reactive versus proactive.<sup>47</sup> Through better planning processes the PAO can better influence the GIE, gain the initiative and achieve the desired informational effect.

After reviewing Army PA doctrine, it is clear the Army provides a much better framework for PA in terms of planning efforts in support of the joint planning process.

Field Manual 3-61.1, Public Affairs, Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTP), provides a systematic approach to PA actions and functions within the joint planning process. The TTP details the two types of planning efforts, deliberate and crisis action, and PA's functions within the different plan development phases. Furthermore, the PA Estimate is discussed in detail and links the estimate to the development of the course of actions (COA) in the joint planning process.<sup>48</sup> In addition, FM 3-61.1 describes the actions needed to develop the PA Annex and how to apply planning principles to common terminology such as mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops, time available and civilian considerations, or METT-TC. The Army provides detailed guidance for PA actions and links it to the joint planning process. This is no surprise given the Army leads the services in doctrine and plan development.

To summarize the review of PA planning in the various service and joint doctrine, there is clearly a different approach to defining actions and processes. Joint doctrine provides an overview of PA roles and functions but stops short of providing PA planning functions in the joint planning process. The Air Force prefers to link PA planning to an effects-based approach, using Air Force unique language but, again, falls short of discussing how PA planning fits into the joint planning process. Lastly, the Army provided detailed material on PA planning listing PA actions within the joint process to include COA, PA estimate, and PA annex development among others. In order for commanders to manage risk and influence the GIE, planning within the PA community must be detailed in doctrine. Instead of reactive, PAOs must be proactive and plan accordingly.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Summary of Findings**

Technology and policy, over the years, have been game changers in the military-media relationship and how successful commanders are in influencing the GIE. From the telegram to satellites, the transmission medium is real-time and immediate. The 24/7 news cycle creates increasing demands on commanders to accommodate media and provide access to military information. Through the years, USG policy dictated media access to military operations. The embedded media program in OIF provided a level of access never seen before in history with over 1,300 journalists embedded with military units in the AOR producing over 6,000 stories per week. The USG and military commanders must leverage this demand with technology and policy to help shape and frame the GIE by getting information to the media before the story takes a negative shape. Gaining the initiative, in mass, using technology and policy enables operations creating the desired effects and meeting objectives and end states.

In addition, education and training for commanders and PA personnel is critical to ensure commanders can effectively engage the media and influence the GIE and public opinion. The PAO plays a major role for the commander engaging the media. Units must be resourced appropriately to build effective SC and PA themes to shape the information domain. Currently, education and training for commanders at the tactical level is limited. Commanders receive limited education and training at PME schools. Exercises are listed as training grounds for the operational commander, staff and PA personnel but not for the tactical commander. PAO manning levels in the Air Force have decreased 48 percent over the last three years increasing the risk assumed by commanders when engaging the media. More research on manning levels in

other services and in DOD is needed to further clarify the risk reduced manning levels assume within DOD.

Integrating PA operations throughout the operational planning phases proved critical during Operations Vigilant Resolve and Al Fajr. Vigilant Resolve neglected PA into the operation and failed to achieve the desired objective. Learning from this mistake, commanders and staff planned for PA activities during Operation Al Fajr and gained the initiative over the media. Objectives were met during the operation and PA operations produced positive results within the GIE. The difference in these operations is how commanders viewed the importance of PA and IO operations. Doctrinal guidance can close this perception gap for commanders. A review of joint, Army, and Air Force IO and PA doctrine revealed differences in approach and level of detail in each publication. Effective planning for SC and PA operations takes center stage in order to effectively communicate the message to the audience and achieve the desired effect. Effective planning guidance within the USAF PA community is not in sync with the level of planning Army PA personnel are provided. AFDD 2-5.3, PA Operations, provides limited guidance whereas FM 3-61.1, PA TTP, provides detailed PA operations integrated into the JOPP. This difference in depth only further highlights the importance planning needs to play within the PA community in order get in front of the message and influence the GIE. Major General McDew, former Director of SAF/PA, pointed this out recently in an interview with Air Force Times. Better planning will help shape the GIE and limit risk associated with media engagement.

### **Implications of the Study**

Commanders, the PA community, and planning staffs will benefit from this research by recognizing how technology, policy, resources, and planning impact the military-media



relationship. Without improvements in these critical areas, commanders and the PA community will continue to be reactive versus proactive in terms of influencing the GIE. Technology will continue to challenge and force the military to stay in sync with the media to meet the high demand for information. Government and military policy will help shape the relationship and therefore the commander must be aware of how policy impacts media requirements and perceptions. Education and training for commanders at the tactical level are limited. These limitations impact a commander's effectiveness when dealing with the media. Public Affairs officer manning levels are extremely low in the Air Force. More research must be done in this area for other services and within the DOD. In the 24/7 news cycle, media requirements and requests will only continue to rise. Manning levels must improve to meet this demand. Joint, Army, and Air Force planning processes in IO and PA doctrine are inconsistent. IO and PA planning doctrine and TTPs provide commanders with proven methods and actions to influence the GIE and achieve desired effects. Through the joint planning process commanders can develop courses of action and select the best option for almost any situation. The PA staff must use these time proven processes to help mitigate risk when trying to influence the GIE.

## **Recommendations**

The focus of the study was aimed at what resources, skill sets, and guidance is needed to prepare commanders and their PA staff at the tactical level to better engage the media to achieve desired effects and mitigate risk of negative reporting or events within the GIE. The research included 1) historical impact of technology and policy, 2) education, training, and manning and 3) planning guidance within joint, Air Force, and Army doctrinal publications. The impact of these areas in the PA community led to four recommendations for DOD and commanders to consider:

1. The USG and military must leverage technology and government/military policy to achieve desired effects within the GIE. Access and accommodation are two areas to address to ensure media demands are met. The GIE can be influenced by manipulating technology and policy and getting ahead of the story thus shaping the GIE to advantage.

2. Improve education and training for tactical level commanders and increase PAO manning within the USAF. Commanders at the tactical level need the education, training, skill sets, and manpower to effectively engage the media. Tactical level PA operations can have strategic impacts. Currently there are limited opportunities for commanders to receive education and training in media engagement. In addition, to educate and train commanders, units should leverage exercises as training ground for tactical level commanders, their staff and PAOs. Resources are constrained as well. PAO manning levels have dropped within the USAF in the past three years and must increase in the future. Low PAO manning levels impacts a commander's ability to engage the media to achieve desired objectives.

3. DOD and USAF develop in-depth doctrine and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) specifically related to PA operations within the joint planning process. Army doctrine and TTPs provides the PA community with detailed criteria guiding PA operations during joint and service specific planning operations. Planning is an area where the PA community can leverage operations to influence the GIE and reduce the level of risk associated with engaging the media. A secondary effect is an improved military-media relationship through a more proactive approach meeting the demand that the media places on the military.

4. This research is limited in scope. More research in education, training, and planning may reveal additional data points to consider for DOD and the military to reduce risk associated with engaging the media. For example, how best to educate and train tactical commanders to

engage the media and influence the GIE must be explored further. In addition, how to ensure the PA community uses proven joint planning principles and embraces joint planning processes to gain the initiative and meet objectives may be a topic for more research.

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